

Subject: Veterinary Task Force Report

I hope you will read the enclosed report, *The Future of FSIS Veterinarians: Public Health Professionals For the 21st Century*, with as much interest and enthusiasm as I did. In early 1999, I convened a select panel to explore how FSIS can better utilize our veterinarians to improve the Nation's public health. I asked the Task Force to look beyond current statutory and regulatory limitations to a visionary future, outside the box.

Specifically, I asked the Task Force to:

- Define how veterinarians can best contribute to the Agency's vision of risk-free food.
- Identify the opportunities to utilize the FSIS veterinarians to optimize public health from farm to table.
- Assess the impact of HACCP on the duties and role of veterinarians.
- Identify expertise needed by the Agency as it relates to skills possessed by veterinarians.
- Define the international role of veterinarians and assess the implications within the international community.
- Identify potential uses of technology and training/education to advance the veterinarian's contributions.

The Task Force consisted of veterinarians from inside and outside of FSIS, a variety of FSIS management personnel, and individuals affiliated with academia, non-government organizations, and foreign governments. They met several times during 1999. In February 2000, FSIS held a public meeting and solicited comments on a draft report.

Recommendations cover five major issues: Defining the role of the FSIS veterinarian; education, training, recognition and recruitment; development and refinement of partnerships; information management centered around animal identification; and veterinary contributions to international credibility.

I applaud the excellent thinking and hard work that Task Force members contributed to this report. I also wish to thank FSIS stakeholders who commented on the draft report. The results identify ways to improve the Agency, as well as the contributions of veterinarians and all other members of the FSIS workforce. Most importantly, implementing the recommendations in the report will contribute immensely to public health and food safety.

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